

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, October 11, 2013**

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

1. RIDE develops "myths and facts" document about assessments and the [Diploma System](#)
2. RIDE posts educators' [Final Effectiveness Ratings](#) at the LEA level; individual ratings remain confidential
3. [National Principals Month](#) celebrated in October
4. Jamestown teacher named R.I. [History Teacher of the Year](#)

**From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE)**

***Assessments:***

5. New [Alternate Assessment](#) pilot test to be administered in April, May

***Health and nutrition:***

6. LEAs encouraged to join [Wellness Collaborative](#); applications due **November 1**
7. RIDE schedules webinar on procurement process for management of [child-nutrition programs](#)

***Instruction:***

8. RIDE updates [Personal Literacy Plan](#) Guidelines

***Using Data:***

9. RIDE releases [Early Warning System](#) tool for helping at-risk students

**From other organizations**

10. RIASCD [Fall Author Forum](#) to be held **November 13**
11. [Children's Books](#) festival to be held **October 19**

---

## Action Item Calendar

*None at this time*

---

### Notes from Commissioner Gist

#### **1. RIDE develops “myths and facts” document about assessments and the Diploma System**

As students across the state are now in the process of taking their NECAP tests as part of our system of statewide assessment, the conversation continues about the appropriate use of NECAP assessments as one element in our diploma system. To help students, families, and the public at large understand the truth about our use of assessments, to tackle misinformation head-on, to allay some public fears and concerns, and to provide students with confidence that they can earn a diploma, we have developed a short “myths and facts” document about our Diploma System. Here are a few of the topics we treat in this document:

*Is it true that students have to pass the NECAP in order to graduate?*

No. The truth is that students who score partially proficient or better when they take the NECAP in grade 11 have met this graduation requirement. Those who have not yet met the graduation requirement will have two opportunities to retake the NECAP again their senior year. If they improve their score, they have met this graduation requirement – regardless of their performance level. RIDE has also approved 10 other assessments, including the PSAT and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, that students can use to meet this graduation requirement. Students for whom – for any reason – tests of any kind are not a good measure of their abilities always have the opportunity to seek a waiver.

*Is it true that the NECAP assessments are not appropriate for use as a graduation requirement?*

No. The truth is that the NECAPs are high-quality assessments that we use for many purposes, including guiding instruction, informing parents about student progress, and as part of the decision-making about placement, services, and graduation. The NECAPs require students to provide written responses to questions that show their thinking and reasoning. Designed on the same model as the MCAS assessments used as a graduation requirement in Massachusetts, the NECAP is an appropriate test for use as one component of a Diploma System.

*Is it true that the NECAP requirement penalizes students who haven't received an adequate education?*

No. The truth is that handing diplomas to students who are not ready for success penalizes students. Although we recognize that schools cannot make up for years of poor, inadequate education with one year of instruction and support, the opportunity to graduate by showing growth ensures that our graduates are at least making progress toward proficiency. This opportunity also ensures that students aren't penalized for something beyond their control.

I have sent a version of this document to local media, and I plan to post the questions and answers over the next few weeks as part of the [Commissioner's Corner](#) on our website. I would be interested in your feedback and in any suggestions you might have that can help us allay public concerns and rectify misconceptions about our Diploma System.

## **2. RIDE posts educators' Final Effectiveness Ratings at the LEA level; individual ratings remain confidential**

Two weeks ago, we released our Year 1 Report on educator evaluations, which included statewide data on the number and percentage of the Final Effectiveness Ratings of educators in Rhode Island: ineffective, developing, effective, and highly effective. In response to requests from the media and in the interest of transparency, we are publishing this same information at the LEA level, which will surely draw media attention. It is important to keep in mind that we strongly discourage use of these data to make comparisons among schools or districts. It is also important to note that results of an individual's evaluation remain confidential and are exempt from release under the Access to Public Records Act.

We posted the district-level Final Effectiveness Ratings this afternoon (October 11) on our website, at:

[www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval](http://www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval).

This report is based on information you have provided to us as of last Monday (October 7). To help preserve confidentiality, we have combined the ratings for teachers and building administrators into one group labeled “educators” and we have omitted results when there were fewer than 10 educators in the data set.

### **3. National Principals Month celebrated in October**

As you have heard me say many times, in order to transform education in Rhode Island we need great teachers in every classroom – and teachers do their work best when we have great leadership in every school. To recognize the vital work and the enormous responsibilities that our principals take on every day, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals have proclaimed this month to be National Principals Month. Let’s all be sure this month – and every month, for that matter – to thank our principals for their dedication to public education. At the request of the Rhode Island Association of School Principals, I plan to see what I can do to have a proclamation issued naming October as Rhode Island Principals Month as well, in keeping with the spirit of this national movement.

### **4. Jamestown teacher named R.I. History Teacher of the Year**

Congratulations to Christine Turilli Bernardo, of the Lawn School, in Jamestown, whom the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History has honored as the 2013 Rhode Island History Teacher of the Year. Christine has been part of the school system in Jamestown for 12 years, and she currently teaches 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It’s really important that we bring history alive for our students, as we seek to develop their understanding of our society and our culture. Keep up your good work, Christine!

**From RIDE**

### ***Assessments:***

### **5. New Alternate Assessment pilot test to be administered in April, May**

Rhode Island is one of 25 states developing a new alternate assessment that will replace our current Rhode Island Alternate Assessment. The Rhode Island Alternate Assessment (RIAA) is the state assessment for the small number of students with significant cognitive disabilities who cannot participate in large-scale assessments even with

accommodations. The new assessment, the National Center and State Consortium (NCSC) alternate assessment, will be given in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 in English language arts and mathematics in the spring of 2015.

In April and May of next year, the Phase 1 of the pilot testing will occur. This phase will test the accessibility and content of the items and the assessment delivery process. The first step in preparing for the pilot test will begin on Tuesday (October 15), when the school-registration website will be available. Student registration will be handled separately and will not be available until next month. Only a sample of students in Rhode Island will be chosen to participate in the pilot. School administrators who serve students currently eligible for the alternate assessment will receive an e-mail next week with information needed to register their school for the pilot. For more information on the NCSC alternate assessment, please go to [www.ride.ri.gov/RIAA](http://www.ride.ri.gov/RIAA) and click on the NCSC tab.

### ***Health and nutrition:***

#### **6. LEAs encouraged to join Wellness Collaborative; applications due **November 1****

RIDE is pleased to provide an opportunity for technical assistance to all Rhode Island School Food Authorities, including public-school districts and charter public schools, to meet new federal wellness-policy requirements that are set by a U.S. Department of Agriculture mandate. This opportunity is geared to those sponsors of the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs. Please share this invitation with your wellness committee and please consider joining the Rhode Island Wellness Collaborative, Round Two. (Eleven Rhode Island school districts took part in Round One last year.)

The Wellness Collaborative will bring together representatives (administrators, parents, food-service personnel, school committee members, physical education teachers, and nurse-teachers) from LEAs to work in a guided group process to:

- better understand the federal mandate for required provisions in local wellness policies;
- complete an assessment of current policy to review for gaps, omissions, and clarity;
- obtain examples of model policy language and resources to update current policy;
- learn about tools to help with policy implementation; and
- share local and national best practices for school wellness.

Districts and schools that apply for and are selected to participate in this Wellness Collaborative will attend three meetings this school year led by RIDE wellness consultant Karin Wetherill.

For more information and instructions on how to apply to participate in the Collaborative, please request a Wellness Collaborative application from Karin, at [kwetherill@cox.net](mailto:kwetherill@cox.net), or review the application by going to:

<http://www.rihsc.org/resources>.

Applications are due on **November 1**.

#### **7. RIDE schedules webinar on procurement process for management of child-nutrition programs**

This year, a number of LEAs are preparing to go out to bid for Food Service Management Company (FSMC) services for child-nutrition programs. Based on a review of procurement requirements, recent FSMC procurements, and discussions with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, RIDE has reviewed and updated the RIDE FSMC Prototype RFP, and we have also developed a new draft agreement. These are documents that all School Food Authorities are required to use.

Becky Bessette, RIDE Child Nutrition Administrator, will present and discuss the FSMC procurement process and review the new FSMC RFP and draft agreement in a webinar on Wednesday, **November 6**, from 2 – 3 p.m. Space is limited, so please register now, at:

<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/278012686>

#### ***Instruction:***

#### **8. RIDE updates Personal Literacy Plan Guidelines**

The Personal Literacy Plan Guidelines have been updated to reflect current initiatives, including the Common Core State Standards, *Comprehensive Assessment System: Rhode Island Criteria & Guidance* document, Rhode Island Response to Intervention Framework, and Data Use Professional Development. Personal Literacy Plan (PLP) Guidelines Third Edition -2013 document is now available, at:

[www.ride.ri.gov/PLP-Guidelines](http://www.ride.ri.gov/PLP-Guidelines).

A highlight included within the revised PLP Guidelines is Appendix F: LEA Self-Reflection Tool. This tool may be used by district and school staff to reflect on their implementation of the Personal Literacy Plans, and results may be used to plan refinement of school- or district-wide implementation of the Personal Literacy Plan process.

***Using Data:***

**9. RIDE releases Early Warning System tool for helping at-risk students**

The Rhode Island Early Warning System (EWS) is now available via RIDEmap. The RIDE EWS tool includes a set of indicators that enables educators and school teams, using current student data, to identify and intervene with students at risk of not graduating from high school on time. The EWS screens all students from grades 6 through 12. RIDE is working with LEA Single Sign-On administrators and technology directors in order to provide the appropriate access to district-, school-, and classroom-level educators. If you are unable to access the EWS in RIDEmap, please contact your technology director or Single Sign-On administrator. For more information on the EWS tool or to schedule a training for educators in your LEA, please contact Cali Cornell ([Cali.Cornel@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Cali.Cornel@ride.ri.gov)).

**From other organizations**

**10. RIASCD Fall Author Forum to be held November 13**

Rhode Island ASCD is pleased to announce that its Fall Author Forum will feature Donald Kachur, co-author of ASCD's latest member book publication, *Engaging Teachers in Classroom Walkthroughs*. The book is a practical guide to planning and implementing brief but focused classroom observations that involve teachers in every step of the process. Drawing from their study of 40 schools in the United States and Canada, readers will learn how administrators and teacher leaders moved fellow teachers from resisting to embracing the practice. This book demonstrates that when teachers learn from one another in a cycle of continuous professional growth—through observation, shared inquiry, dialogue, and follow-up—they develop a sense of collegiality and a common mission. (Added bonus: Two prominent Rhode Island educators are featured in the book!)

Register at [www.riascd.org](http://www.riascd.org) for the **November 13** dinner event, which is open to all.

**11. Children's Books festival to be held October 19**

The Rhode Island Center for the Book and the Lincoln School invite you to attend the Rhode Island Festival of Children's Books & Authors. Authors at the event will include Newbery Award winners Avi and Sharon Creech, who have written more than 60 books for young children; Adam Gidwitz; Daniel Handler, author of the widely popular *Lemony Snicket* series; Jarrett Krosoczka, author of the *Lunch Lady* series; *Over and Under the Snow* author Kate Messner; Bill Harley; Kimberly Newton Fusco; Laurie Keller; Gregory Mone; Rhode Island Children's Book Award winner Dan Santat; and Rhode Island's own Chris Van Allsburg, world-renowned author and illustrator of *The Polar Express*. Young readers and their parents will have the chance to meet and talk with the authors, have their books personally signed, participate in bookmaking and other crafts, and view a special performance. The Festival will take place on Saturday, **October 19**, from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Lincoln School, 301 Butler Ave., Providence—celebrates the unique joy that can only be found by opening the pages of a book. Admission is \$5. For a full listing of performances and activities, visit [www.lincolnschool.org](http://www.lincolnschool.org) or call the school at 331-9696, extension 3135.